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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 2169

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RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002842

SIPDIS

GENEVA FOR RMA

DEPT FOR PRM/ANE AND PRM/A; EAP/MLS

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TAGS: PREF PHUM SMIG TH LA

SUBJECT: THAILAND AND LAO HMONG: PM ABHISIT PUSHES  
TRANSPARENCY, FM KASIT CONFIRMS NO LARGE SCALE RETURNS SOON

REF: BANGKOK 2724

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a November 5 call by Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams on Prime Minister Abhisit, the Ambassador raised concerns regarding Lao Hmong in Petchabun and stressed the need for transparent processing of the "screened-in" Hmong. PM Abhisit told the Ambassador that he had pushed for transparency for the Hmong during a meeting with Lao counterpart on the margins of the recent October 23-25 ASEAN Summit. EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel and the DCM stressed during a separate November 5 meeting with Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya that it was important to insure fair and transparent treatment for the Hmong, particularly for those "screened-in." The Foreign Minister said that PM Abhisit and the Lao PM, and his own meeting with the Lao FM, had agreed that the Hmong could not all be returned by the end of the year and assured DAS Marciel that RTARF would not attempt to hurriedly return the Hmong as RTARF had proposed to us last week (reftel). End summary.

PRIME MINISTER PUSHES TRANSPARENCY

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¶2. (C) During visiting Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams' November 5 call on Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, which centered on the Peace Corps Thailand's role in strong bilateral relations (septel), the Ambassador raised RTG plans for expediting the return of Lao Hmong in Petchabun to Laos (reftel). The Ambassador stressed the importance of expeditious and transparent processing of the "screened-in" Hmong, with a goal of third-country resettlement, and therefore the need to conduct as much of this processing as possible within Thailand prior to a return of the Hmong to Laos. The Ambassador also emphasized to the Prime Minister the need to provide the USG with a list of the "screened-in" Hmong. The Ambassador underscored our desire to assist the Thai government as it coordinated with non-governmental organizations resettlement of the Hmong to other countries.

¶3. (C) PM Abhisit took the Ambassador's points on board, replying that while he understood that it would not be practical to "just send them back," the RTG had already delayed action on this issue for one year. Abhisit explained that he had pushed for transparency for Hmong who were returned to Laos during a meeting with Lao Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh at the October 23-25 ASEAN Summit.

¶4. (C) During a separate November 5 meeting with Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya to discuss Burma, EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marcil also raised RTG plans for the more than 4,000 Lao Hmong in Petchabun. DAS Marcil stressed to the Foreign Minister that it was important to insure that the Hmong were treated fairly and those who were returned did not fear for their safety. The DCM told FM Kasit that the Embassy had been dismayed to learn October 26 from Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) Director of Border Affairs LTG Nipat Thonglek that plans had been made to deport all the Hmong to Laos in early November. That said, Refcoord and visiting PRM Director Elizabeth Hopkins had received a much more positive signal November 4 from MFA and RTARF officials who had explained that the RTG did not intend to return the Hmong soon. It was important for the U.S., the RTG, and other members of the international community to work together to find a solution for those Hmong who cannot safely return to Laos, both those in Nong Khai and those in Phetchabun who had been "screened-in" by the RTG, the DCM stressed. The DCM also told Kasit that the USG would try to continue to fund NGO activities in Petchabun through April 30, as RTARF has requested.

¶5. (C) FM Kasit confirmed for DAS Marcil and the DCM that the Thai and Lao PMs, and separately the FMs, had agreed during their meetings at the ASEAN Summit to push back the bilaterally agreed-upon deadline from the end of this year for return of the Hmong, due to absorption rate concerns.

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The RTARF understood these commitments, Kasit said, and would not try to move all the Hmong by the end of the year. FM Kasit also stressed the need for transparency and the involvement of the IOM.

¶6. (C) FM Kasit noted he had met a group of Wisconsin and Minnesota-based Hmong in the late summer and had encouraged them to initiate projects that would improve the lives of Hmong in Laos, suggesting that Thailand could also contribute to such projects. This would help to address factors that had led the Hmong to flee to Thailand, Kasit said. Kasit had raised this idea with Lao FM Thongloun Sisoulith in their meeting on the margins of the ASEAN summit; the Lao FM in reply had emphasized the difficulty that would arise if foreign assistance was seen as being directed towards only the Hmong, suggesting it was better to promote wide-ranging development in Laos. Kasit hoped to meet again soon with U.S.-based Hmong representatives in order to further explore this idea. The Lao FM had also assured equal treatment to the Hmong, including passport issuances, Kasit added.

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